THE PRICE OF PEACE

What Our Prosperity Costs Year by Year in Human Life

By W. G. FITZ-GERALD

Drawing by Walter H. Everett

THE figures of our prosperity, given out by the statisticians in Washington, have amazed the world and ourselves. Our farmers in 1906 got seven thousand millions' worth out of their broad acres; our imports total one thousand three hundred millions, while the exports exceed seven hundred millions. The total wealth of the country is computed at one hundred and six thousand millions, and it climbs in immense leaps and bounds every year. The strange thing is, few people realize that it has a dark and sinister side; that this industrial Juggernaut, this triumphant lord of the world, must be fed with human lives and limbs in a manner which it is nothing short of criminal to ignore.

"Peace," we are told, "hath her victories no less renown'd than war." True. But what a shock it is to realize that they are bought far more dearly! "In the United States," declared President Roosevelt, "the casualties attendant upon peaceful industries exceed those which happen under a great and perpetual war." I quote from a private letter to Dr. Josiah Strong on the subject of "Safety Devices" for the better protection of our industrial army.

But who cares for such things, when Prosperity's mill is running at top speed? "If I produce a device to save time," said a clever inventor to me the other day, "I can sell it readily in twenty places; but if I offer an idea for saving life, I cannot dispose of it at all."

In other words, while we know accurately the number of cattle and hogs slaughtered for food, it is nobody's business to take account of the lives and limbs crushed out every year in this great country. It is terrible, but true; and a brief study of the facts and figures lends point to the dictum of the old Sioux chief. "It costs too much to be a white man," said he sadly.

During the four years of the Civil War the number of killed on both sides was one hundred and fifty thousand. Well, in these piping times of peace our industries are slaughtering man for man of these, and eighty thousand more in the same period. Every year an industrial Bull Run of deaths is furnished by the Pennsylvania coal fields alone; while the annual total of killed and wounded on the railroads vastly exceeds the entire losses of Briton and Boer in all the three years of that bloody conflict.

Thus it was mere lack of knowledge of the facts that caused astonishment in the community when a man like J. J. Hill remarked gravely, "Every time I undertake a railroad journey nowadays I wonder whether it is to be my last."

Half a Million a Year

ACCORDING to the Government's own figures we kill five hundred and seventy-five thousand every ten years, and injure more or less seriously five millions more. This equals the massacre of every man, woman, and child in three great cities the size of Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Denver; and the maiming of everyone in Wyoming, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and Oklahoma. And the reason is cynically given—not expressed, but understood: "It is cheaper to kill men than to protect them." For this reason it seems there is no excitement; no deeply stirred public sentiment; no Hague tribunals to stop the slaughter,—more dreadful, more extensive, and more regular and lasting than any international war.

Why, if fifty thousand people were killed and half a million maimed in a single year in any one community the world would be aghast; while a disaster like the San Francisco earthquake and fire would necessarily pale into insignificance. And yet when fifty-seven thousand fatalities are distributed evenly between ocean and ocean, they are just as dead and the families are just as badly off as if their bread winners had all been engulfed in the cataclysm of a moment.

War of course is spectacular, while industrial slaughter is accounted merely sordid. Hence, no doubt, the indifference of public opinion in the matter. "And yet," remarked a smart railroad man in St. Louis, "when soldiering is as deadly as switching, take my word for it international disarmament will be at hand."

In truth this complex modern life is beset with a host of artificial perils. We build higher and faster. We are burrowing under rivers and cities; finding new and more powerful explosives; using more and more chemicals that liberate noxious gases; making new applications of electricity, with all its subtle dangers. Daily we invent perils to life and limb of which our fathers never dreamed.

But to get closer to this seamy side of our national prosperity, let me divide the casualties among the following: (1) Railroads; (2) Mines and quarries; (3) Factories and workshops; (4) Building and construction; (5) Agricultural and lumbering. These cover perhaps thirty million wage earners.

Railroads' Terrible Harvest

NOW, the railroad figures are perhaps the most complete and trustworthy of all, thanks to the work of the Interstate Commerce Commission. It is shown that railroading and traveling on the railroad is more than twice as dangerous now as it was fifteen years ago. And if the present rate of increase continues during the next five years there will be sixty thousand slaughtered and six hundred and twenty-five thousand injured. Here, then, is a vast army of victims to our industrial Juggernaut, now under sentence of death and to be executed by the railroads far more surely than by any State law.

The present average is about thirty killed and two hundred and fifty injured every day of the year. And, as I have said, the ratio increases in spite of automatic couplings and scientific safety devices. Where one man in thirty-five was killed or injured in 1889, the figures are now one in nineteen. The roads kill one man out of every two hundred and seventy of their employees; while in Austria the figures are only one in one thousand and sixty-seven. And nations like Germany, with comparatively low proportions of casualties, mark over fifty per cent. of these as "avoidable." The security of a railroad passenger's life on a British or a German line is more than twice as great as it is here at home. In the first nineteen days of last year our systems killed outright one hundred and thirty-six persons, and mangled one hundred and ten more. But on all the lines of the German Empire in one year only seventy-four lives were lost, and in France only eighteen. But in the same year we killed ten thousand and forty-six and injured eighty-four thousand one hundred and fifty-five.

The President, it is worth noting, in a recent message called attention to the need of an eight-hour day for railroad men. A month later came an awful wreck near Washington itself, and investigation showed the engineer had had only eight hours' sleep out of the previous fifty-seven.

The figures of the railroad casualties, given out from time to time by the Interstate Commerce Commission, attract newspaper thunder and the lightning of public indignation. But constant iteration makes us grow accustomed to them. We come at length to accept with resignation a "perpetual war on humanity," as President Roosevelt calls it,—more bloody and persistent than any civil or international warfare recorded in history. Perhaps if by a miracle all accidents could be held up for six months, and then this nation and all the world were shocked by a quarter of a million in a single day, something might result.

Toll of the Coal Mines

WE see the same reckless disregard for human life in the coal mines; which, by the way, are worth far more to us than all the gold, silver, and copper mines put together. I am indebted to John Mitchell, President of the United Mine Workers, for his figures. "In fifteen States that report mine accidents," he says, "five thousand nine hundred and eighty-six miners of all grades were killed and injured last year [1906]. And in the remaining fifteen States where mining is important I estimate the deaths at two thousand and the injured at four thousand." Thus in the anthracite, bituminous, iron, copper, lead, silver, and gold mines and quarries, there would be in an average year twelve thousand either killed or injured. Pennsylvania's coal mines alone reported one thousand one hundred and twenty-three killed and two thousand three hundred and sixty-five injured in 1906, a total of nearly three thousand five hundred. If all coal fields are included and one year with another is taken, I suppose two thousand men lay down their lives